
The District Clerk and the "Man-Leopard Murders" *Mediating Law and Authority in Colonial Nigeria*

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The equivocal social and political position of colonial clerks offers a window on the changing modalities of colonial rule and on the influence of Africans in the mediation and application of colonial law and authority. In the sphere of "working misunderstandings" between the colonial state and society, the scope for African auxiliaries to exercise their own initiative, creativity, and power was broad. An expanding bureaucracy meant that where district officers were distant and aloof, clerks, letter writers, and interpreters became part of the local social landscape and part of new personal networks.¹ Clerks controlled the gateways to colonial courts and bureaucracies and hence exercised great influence over these important sites of struggle for access to resources and the meanings of social relationships and authority. Exactly how important their role was and the precise nature of the balance they struck between self-interest and official service have been the subject of the albeit limited literature on colonial clerks in West Africa.²

Two dominant perspectives on African clerks and intermediaries are of central relevance to the events in southeastern Nigeria just after the Second World War that are discussed here. The first concerns the way that colonial clerks are perceived within a dichotomy of collaboration and resistance. Some commentators stress the oppressive role of collaborating colonial functionaries. E. A. Ayandele, for instance, writes that intermediaries in colonial Nigeria were veritable oppressors.³ He argues that the pinches of colonial rule were felt from the hands of the letter writer, the sanitary inspector, the policeman, the warrant chief, the court clerk, the interpreter, and the tax gatherer. Other perspectives stress what we might call a model of ruse and an image of clerks engaged in self-serving chicanery. In representing local rather than colonial concerns and individual rather than public interests, clerks and other functionaries provided a counterpoint to a stereotypical image of an all-seeing colonial administration confronting passive African societies. Those involved in carrying out the day-to-day requirements of colonial rule could challenge colonial attempts to reshape African societies. Collaborators or resisters? Tricksters or loyal civil servants? Although the intermediary role of clerks offered opportunities for accumulation and personal promotion, this story illustrates that they might also be held to account by the multiple constituencies for whom they were brokers. This essay is a counterpoint to interpretations of functionaries as tricksters. They could overreach, and the room for maneuver at the interface between customary, civic, and state spheres was finite.

The second point is that clerks formed part of the literate elite and hence part of a wider political trajectory involving the educated elite's changing relationship to colonial rule. Forms of organization and mobilization coalesced around clerks, and many early unions were founded by them. They formed the secretariat and members of the "ethnic unions" who, along with the local press, championed their cause. After the 1940s one of the most widespread nationalist demands was for Africans to be able to advance from the clerical to the upper ranks of government service. In this sense clerks, although intimately part of the colonial order, constituted an important element of the nationalist elite who ultimately undermined that order and assumed power from it. Yet this simple narrative trajectory—from collaborator to resister—overlooks the difficulties that clerks faced in negotiating the contradiction. It ignores the personal tribulations of those engaged in coming to terms with moments when the room to maneuver an already

tricky terrain was constrained. This was particularly apparent during the Second World War years, when political nationalism extended beyond a narrow group of radicals to be taken up by the "reading public" at large.

To understand these points we need to situate our observations within cultural frameworks, within the fine grain of individual motivations, and of course historically. The situation for clerks and other intermediaries in southeastern Nigeria, where this story is set, is much cited, largely because of A. E. Afigbo's seminal work on the modalities of indirect rule.⁴ Throughout the second and third decades of the twentieth century, clerks in the southeastern Nigerian provinces gained a dubious reputation. Indirect rule provided what Jean-François Bayart has called an "academy for improvisation" in which these "auxiliary tricksters," the interpreters, messengers, and clerks, could profit from their function as political and cultural intermediaries.⁵ After Frederick Lugard's reforms of 1914, the ascendancy of the court clerk was determined by the infrequent presence of political officers and the use of English on the forms and records of the court. The warrant chiefs depended on the court clerks' favor. They paid bribes for their seats on the bench and addressed the clerks as "master."

The fallout of the Women's War of 1929 and the administrative reforms introduced by Governor Cameron in 1933 led to a rapid multiplication of courts and councils and with them a new set of problems. New clerks had to be found and trained. Candidates attracted by the relatively low salaries did not have the highest educational qualifications. Hence, the district officer at Abak reported that although the court clerks of this period learned to keep cash books and to issue processes, they learned little about court procedure and less about the law. With the outbreak of the Second World War, clerks were laid off, others left the service in favor of the profits of trade, and those who remained struggled to make ends meet against a plummeting exchange rate with the local manila currency. Civil service positions of the period were synonymous with corruption, especially when the literate elites, the "reading public" took up anticorruption campaigns during and after the war.

This story is set within the fast changing postwar political landscape and focuses on events described in the British press during 1947 as "the strangest, biggest murder hunt in the world."⁶ Between 1943 and 1948 almost two hundred mysterious deaths were recorded in a remote corner of southeastern Nigeria. By the end of the investigation, seventy-seven men had been executed by the British colonial authorities for

murder. The deaths took place in southern Annang territory in the districts of Abak and Opobo under Calabar Province and were among the last murders in Africa to be publicly attributed to the human-leopard society or any of the continent's other theriomorphic cults.⁷ The subterfuge of a leopard-style attack, with copycat mutilations, created doubts about the identity of the killer, whether man or beast, from the outset. The shape-shifting powers that the killers were said to invoke (in Annang they were known as *Ekpe-Owo*, "the leopard men") only heightened an air of mystery that was compounded by contradictory and fragile evidence. Toward the end of the investigation, those closest to it feared that the origin of the outbreak of "leopard" murders would probably never be discovered with any degree of certainty.⁸

During the three years of investigations, hundreds of police officers were drafted into the districts; special sessions of the Supreme Court were held to hear "man-leopard" cases; pathologists were flown-in from Lagos; and forensic tests were carried out in London. Yet, like every good detective story, the case hinged on just a few personalities, their pet theories, and their petty intrigues. This handful of characters included the district officer at Abak, Frederick Kay, who first pursued rumors of human leopards and is credited with setting the investigation on its course; the senior police officer, D.S. Fountain, whose weekly reports filtered and analyzed the evidence; prominent local chiefs such as Obong Udo Ekong, who earned great credit for his unswerving support for the administration during the crisis; leading Annang and Ibibio elites, such as Dr. Egbert Udo Udoma, the president of the Ibibio Union, who became embroiled in the investigation and dragged its controversial fallout into the nationalist politics of the 1950s; and the district officer of the "leopard area," John McCall, whose secret reports in late 1947 threw the entire investigation into turmoil.

This chapter focuses on another of the pivotal figures in the investigations of the man-leopard murders, Usen Udo Usen. An Ibibio from Ikot Offiong in Itu Division, Usen had been an interpreter since 1926 for M. D. W. Jeffreys, a district officer who later became an academic anthropologist. By 1947 Usen was the district clerk in Uyo, the headquarters of the predominantly Ibibio Uyo Division. Outside office hours Usen was a prominent member of the leading "progressive union" in the province, the Ibibio Union. Formed in 1928 by traders, schoolteachers, and clerks from the six Ibibio and Annang districts of Calabar Province, the Ibibio Union had become a powerful political force by the early 1940s, gaining credibility from its self-funded education projects and its direct

engagement in the local and national political sphere.⁹ Usen Udo Usen joined the Ibibio Union at its inaugural meeting and was appointed its general secretary in 1933, a post he would hold until the events of 1947. It was in both these capacities, as district clerk and as secretary to the Ibibio Union, that Usen Udo Usen would become involved in the leopard murder investigation. And it was precisely as a result of this peculiar position that his predicament arose. By the end of the investigation, Usen Udo Usen had fled Calabar Province after being publicly ostracized by the Ibibio Union. But just a year later he received the Certificate of Honour from the government for his part in bringing the murders to an end. The certificate itself was awarded posthumously, however, as Usen died under suspicious circumstances in Enugu in 1949.

Was Usen Udo Usen a stool pigeon who betrayed his own people for promotion, or a scapegoat who fell victim to political intrigue? The background to the incidents in which Usen Udo Usen's career was both made and lost was extraordinary, though the problems he, like other clerks, confronted in mediating law and authority during this period were not. Usen positioned himself at the center of a complex of forces aligned rhetorically as civic power with its characteristic defense of rights in the public sphere, customary rule that fused "every moment of power" in the office of chieftaincy and between both these spheres and the local colonial state.¹⁰ Yet during the events of 1947 authority and the claims on which it was based shifted quickly and unpredictably. Political authority was contested by chiefs, diviners, district officers, the police, and the new elites, and by unlikely alliances of these groups. Judicially colonial legal codes based on forensic evidence would abut customary practice based on the performance of oath and ordeal. And culturally colonial rationality would both collide and collude with secrecy and the supernatural. This chapter focuses on two aspects of Usen Udo Usen's role in the leopard murder investigations: on his part in peace-keeping ceremonies conducted in Annang villages at the height of the murders, and on the political fallout of a report he presented on the killings. Usen's story illustrates how clerks employed a range of discourses and devices from customary, civic, and colonial spheres simultaneously to secure consent within the relationships they mediated.

The Crime Scene

The "man-leopard" murders occurred in a landscape of flat, dense oil palm on the west bank of the Qua Iboe River. Some 130 Annang villages

within an area just ten miles in diameter were affected. Located between two of the "oil" rivers flowing south to the coast, this Annang territory lay adjacent to Ogoni and Igbo communities across the Imo River to the south and the west, and to the Ibibio across the Qua Iboe River to the northeast. Dialectically distinct from their Ibibio neighbors, Annang nevertheless shared with them a common political, economic, and cultural fabric. In the lineage-based Annang society, the powers of village heads and councils were counterbalanced by those of secret societies, especially the leopard society (*ekpe*), the ancestral masquerade (*ekpo*), and the warrior cult (*ekong*).¹¹ Despite the economic significance of this oil-palm hinterland, the villages in which the murders occurred constituted a remote administrative backwater far from the political and commercial hub of Calabar. The borderland between Opobo and Abak Division gained a reputation for lawlessness and resistance, which came to a head, so far as colonial opinion was concerned, in the spread of the Women's War into these districts in late 1929.

In the years preceding the outbreak of the Second World War, Calabar Province was subject to radical political, economic, and religious upheaval. Reforms to the local courts and councils in the aftermath of the Women's War designed to resolve an emerging intergenerational rift instead turned the courts and councils into spheres of intense political contest. Native court benches intended for lineage heads were usurped by former warrant chiefs and "other thrustful energetic and unscrupulous young men who ha[d] arrogated to themselves the power and right of trying cases."¹² The control of local taxation revenue made representation on the council, like seats on the bench, a prize for new elites and elders alike, and the "committee class" of young men who made up the "vociferous, letter-writing minority" formed progressive welfare societies publicly to expose corruption within the Native Administration and privately to usurp its perquisites. Economically the rising cost of living, the slump in the palm-oil price in the late 1930s, and the declining exchange rate with the local manila currency in the early 1940s affected commodity producers and civil servants alike.¹³ Complaints of acute economic hardship had indeed surfaced during a women's tax riot in the neighboring district of Ikot Ekpene in November 1944. And in the religious context, three factors marked the war years: the perception of a resurgence of secret societies resorting to vigilante justice; concerted mission pressure to criminalize these societies; and an apparent crisis among the Annang divination order of *idion*, whose monopoly on prognostication was challenged by the

emergence of "spiritual churches" such as the Christ Army and Sabbath churches.¹⁴

These developments, along with the direct consequences of the war, of commodity shortages, cut-backs in administrative personnel, and demobilization, made up the social landscape against which the "leopard" murders took place. But it was the physical landscape that determined their features. The dense oil-palm belt of southern Annang territory was natural leopard habitat, and it was hard to distinguish between real leopard attacks and those that simulated them. The victims appeared to have been killed in the same way a wild leopard attacks its prey, from behind and biting at the throat. The murders were linked in the style of the assault and corpse mutilation, with arms and heads severed and flesh scraped off, and in the location of the attacks, always on an isolated bush path at dusk. Forensic investigations were further complicated by the suspicion that the killers used a set of clawlike blades to commit the murders and placed leopard hair, droppings, and pad marks made by carved wooden sticks ("leopard shoes") to disguise the scene of the crime.¹⁵

Persistent rumors and press articles that strange deaths had been caused by a "leopard society" were largely ignored, and the leopard style of murder had apparently duped the resources of forensic pathology since 1943. It was not until 1945 that the authorities began to investigate local speculation that these deaths were part of a series.¹⁶ In March 1945 the district officer at Abak, Frederick Kay, was alerted to local suspicions, published in the *Nigerian Eastern Mail*, that Dan Udofia, who died at Ikot Okoro after being attacked while tapping palm wine, had fallen victim not to a leopard, as the principal witnesses claimed, but rather to members of a man-leopard society. The victim was the houseboy of the head court messenger at Ikot Okoro, Okon Bassey, on whom the finger of suspicion fell. Seriously wounded, Udofia had found his way back to the court compound after being attacked, but Bassey prevented the local dispenser from seeing him, failed to report his death, and buried Udofia himself. This strange behavior, coupled with details of a previous dispute between the men, secured Bassey's conviction.¹⁷ He was hanged in Abak in March 1946, the first of seventy-seven "man-leopards" to be executed.

Despite initial skepticism about the existence of a human-leopard society, officers began to investigate postmortem and police reports in "leopard" killings prior to the Udofia case, and by December 1945 they claimed there was conclusive evidence that a leopard society had

committed the murders in the Ekparakwa, Ikot Ibritam, and Ibesit Native Court areas. In early January 1946, a ninety-five-strong police detachment was drafted into the area and given extensive additional powers to conduct its investigations the following month when Abak and Opobo were declared "proclaimed districts" under the Peace Preservation Ordinance.¹⁸ Over 100 deaths were under investigation at the beginning of 1946, yet by June only thirteen convictions had been secured, and the killings continued. Calls for more forthright action were met with public executions that began in September 1946, a dusk to dawn curfew, and the dispatch of a two-hundred-strong "leopard force," which was billeted in villages where murders had taken place to act as a deterrent to further killings and as a form of collective punishment.¹⁹ By the end of 1946 some 157 murders had been investigated. Of these 64 were classified as probable, and 93 were possible "man-leopard" murders.²⁰

The Motives

With the subterfuge of the killings apparently exposed, the mutilations inflicted on the victims became subject to intense scrutiny. A number of questions arose: Why were the mutilations so precisely copied in so many cases? And why were the mutilations so elaborate? Was the removal of flesh from the bodies part of the disguise or part of the reason for the murders? For three years these questions sparked a debate as to whether these were ritual or revenge murders.²¹ In the early stages of the investigation, it was believed that the mutilations at the murder scene were linked either to a "master-juju" reminiscent of the Long Juju of Arochukwu or to a series of small village shrines before which the killers performed appeasement ceremonies.²² Rumors surfaced that the killers were selling flesh and body parts to buyers for prominent shrines in neighboring Ogoniland and to the Annang *idion* society of diviners.²³ The leopard men, it was suggested, were contracted as the agents of *idion* priests who sought organs of the body to satisfy the demands and enhance the power of their shrines. Hence *idion* would divine the cause of their client's ill luck or illness or of a relative's death and would "encourage and counsel the commission of murder as the only means of settling a grievance, real or imaginary and afford the murderers every assistance in the preparation of the crime."²⁴

By 1947 no firm evidence had been uncovered to corroborate this view, however, although suspicion still hung over the diviners as likely

accessories to murder. As the investigation explored alternative lines of inquiry, analysis of the *ekpe-owo* cases during 1946 revealed that the accused had a personal motive for killing the victim.²⁵ As a result official opinion shifted away from the belief that an organized society was directing the murders for ritual purposes and toward the idea that those accused of committing murder were part of, or had hired, a band of professional assassins, a "native form of "Murder Incorporated," compelled by the "Corsican vendetta."²⁶ Of the ninety-seven cases confirmed as "leopard murders" by November 17, 1947, the investigation revealed revenge and jealousy, especially linked to unresolved court cases concerning brideprice, land, and debts, as the prime motives for the leopard murders.²⁷ Innovations in customary law and frustrations in the courts led people to take matters into their own hands, and it was argued that "one of the main underlying causes of the outbreak of murders in this area was an existing need by these people for a speedier and more ruthless form of justice than that provided by the British System."²⁸

As evidence of vendetta-style assassinations was mounting, a murder on January 25, 1947, shifted the thrust of the investigation once more.²⁹ The murder was that of one of the investigating police officers, P. C. Evans Chima, and the circumstances surrounding his death appeared for the first time to confirm suspicions that the *idion*'s part in the murders was malicious. This particular case was notable as it concerned the only death of a serving officer in the colonial administration and inevitably raised the question of whether the colonial regime was itself a target of the "leopard men."³⁰ Its real significance, however, was that it was the most high profile death in which explicitly ritual motives were reported. Confession evidence extracted from one of the four accused killers stated that they had killed P. C. Chima in order to remove his lips for empowering an *idion* shrine.³¹

Senior police officers thought this evidence was the breakthrough their investigation desperately needed and that *idion*'s involvement might be the "missing link in the chain connecting all the murders."³² Though the confession was problematic and no remains were found at the suspected *idion* shrine, this case was fundamental to the colonial argument that these were "medicine murders."³³ As a direct result the *idion* society was prohibited in February 1947.³⁴ On February 27 the police mounted a dawn raid in which over three hundred *idion* shrines were destroyed, and the diviners themselves were taken to police camps for questioning. Cases in which *idion* members were implicated

in providing information leading to revenge killings had caused the provincial administration to consider a ban on *idion* once before.³⁵ In 1940, however, the resident of Calabar Province was hopeful that the practice of consulting *idion* to determine the cause of death would be held in check by "public opinion coupled with energetic action by District Officers."³⁶ The government was reticent to act more firmly against *idion* because it was reluctant to weaken the authority of the many chiefs in the region who were *idion* initiates themselves.

In 1940 the government sought the advice of the Ibibio Union about this question but ignored the union when the question resurfaced in 1947. The Ibibio Union had consistently opposed the ban, and the prohibition of *idion* in 1947 was to be the source of a long-running and very public dispute. The union maintained that the laws of *idion* prevented initiates from shedding blood, that *idion* would lose the power of divination if they committed murder, that the ban had been applied to an order of *idion* known as *ifa*, which was not involved in divination, and drew attention to the contradiction that local "spiritual" churches, including the Christ Army Church, was also offering prophesy and divining motives for revenge but had not been prohibited. A further line of argument was based on the right of religious freedom. Nyong Essien, the Calabar Province representative in the Regional House of Assembly, asserted in a speech during the legislative council meeting in March 1947 that "*Idion* should enjoy the protection which other religions in Nigeria enjoy under the law."

The Ibibio Union and "Civic Duty"

Just days before the police raid on the *idion* shrines, the Ibibio Union had held its annual conference and resolved to demand from the provincial authorities that it be allowed "to take the matter into their own hands . . . with the view of stamping out the obnoxious society from Ibibiolands. It [was] also requested that the Government be good enough to provide transport for native Chiefs and important citizens of the six districts of Ibibioland who [were] to come with their traditional emblems to restore order and peace in the affected areas."³⁷ The governor, suspicious of the impression conveyed by the authorities' admission of failure, framed the union's proposal for a delegation to tour the villages of the "leopard area" in a subversive light: "The Union's motives are largely political, with the object of diverting from Government to themselves the credit for putting a stop to these crimes."³⁸ Yet the

government feared that the murder rate during the early months of 1947 was increasing, and was persuaded by local police officers who thought that the Ibibio Union's peacekeeping ceremonies would prove to be "the culminating factor in reducing the existing murder rate."³⁹

Though these circumstances were extraordinary, the Ibibio Union's actions were not unprecedented. They echoed attempts to prevent the spread of the Women's War in 1929 and 1944 and extended the idea of the touring delegation that conducted "enlightenment" and antibribery campaigns during the early 1940s. The idea of touring the district drew directly on colonial administrative practice and had been similarly appropriated by other figures of the urban middle-class such as the newspaper editor J. V. Clinton. Indeed, the proposed tour was consistent with a longstanding discourse the Ibibio Union espoused in its relationship with the colonial state. In 1940 the Ibibio Union had outlined to the governor its desire to be considered part of the administrative structure and represented its role as that of a mediator:

To go hand in hand and interpret the policies of the Government to natives,
To see that the laws and orders of the Government were kept, and,

A medium through which the government can speak to the Ibibio tribe as a whole.⁴⁰

The union's tour of the man-leopard villages was an exercise of these civic responsibilities. Here was an opportunity for the Ibibio Union to "demonstrate its national feeling—to do its civic duty; to help the innocent victims of the murderers; to redeem the good name of Ibibioland, nay the Calabar Province."⁴¹ The difference on this occasion, however, was that the union's civic agenda was articulated not in literate and "civilizing" form but in an alliance with the most prominent provincial chiefs ostensibly in defense of another bastion of the conservative rural hierarchy, the *idionj* "priests."

The union's touring deputation was mandated under the Native Authority Ordinance of 1943 to compel villagers to attend public meetings, which they did in over eighty meetings organized during May, June, and July 1947. Usen Udo Usen was appointed as the permanent secretary to the tour and along with his assistant, W. K. Ekanem, coordinated the logistics with the police and district officials. D. S. Fountain, the senior police officer in charge of the investigations, would later write that in Usen Udo Usen the union had appointed a remarkably good leader: "Usen devoted the whole of his energies to his task and showed a most unusual determination to put a stop to the murders at all costs. As an

Ibibio himself, he felt that the situation in the area was a stigma on the good name of his tribe and that it was incumbent on him to wipe it away."⁴²

During the tour Usen received deputations, settled minor disputes, and heard public grievances. He recorded this in a tour diary of over two hundred typed pages of entries compiled from each of the village meetings, copies of which were submitted at intervals to the authorities. Every murder case was itemized, and local opinions, usually those of the elders, were given as to the cause of the killings. Diary entries reveal that several villagers gave Usen clues as to possible links between the murders and various secret societies. The diary also demonstrates that Usen publicly defended the government's position. When confronted by the village head and former *idionj* member in Inen Ikot Esien, who asked if the government was justified in destroying his *idionj* shrine when he claimed to have no knowledge of the man-leopard killing practice, Usen replied, "When the cases of many killings under the guise of Leopard by your people was brought into book, it was proved beyond doubt that Idionj diviners were the cause of the many killings. . . . I consider that the Government was right in the measures taken to prohibit Idionj Cult at the time, but in the case of destroying I reserve my opinion. . . . The answer I give you in connection with Idionj is my personal opinion which has nothing to do with the general opinion of the Ibibio people."⁴³ "It must have taken considerable courage," one officer wrote, "for Mr Usen to speak out so forthrightly."⁴⁴ This speech, along with other passages from the union's tour diary, was cited extensively by the government as evidence justifying the continued ban on the *idionj* order. The authorities also believed that such a forthright view must have indicated unanimity among the touring delegates, though this would prove to be a presumptuous conclusion.

The tour delegation comprised thirty-six chiefs, representing the six Ibibio and Annang districts, each possessing "the ancient judicial rights in capital offences, homicide and manslaughter."⁴⁵ Some of the delegates, such as Chief Udo Ekong, had been involved in the investigations previously as members of District Officer Kay's Native Authorities Investigating Committee. On this occasion, however, the chiefs were there to see that every tax-paying villager pledged an oath that he would not aid or join the leopard men.⁴⁶ Initially, Usen had assured the Resident of Calabar Province that the customary *mbiam* oath "in the true sense" would not be sworn, but in fact in each of the villages Christians swore on verses of the Bible and non-Christian villagers were

made to swear *mbiam*.⁴⁷ Reports of the oath-swearing process are contradictory, but notes submitted to the authorities recorded the ceremony as starting with the burying of a palm frond (*eyei*) across the road leading to the village, after which an elephant tusk (*nnuk enin*) was blown three times. Salt, sand, and water from the village were mixed and poured over the buried palm leaf. Villagers then walked across the buried palm leaf in order to undertake the "solemn agreement" that they would not join or hide *ekpe-owo*.⁴⁸

Colonial and Annang epistemological paradigms and divergent conceptions of agency and causation began to collapse into one another during the murder investigations. In this context, where secrecy and oaths shrouded certainties and truths, the performative constitution of local knowledge was key. Annang concepts of truth are acquired through the process of testing (*ndomo nse*, "to test and see"). Oaths (*mbiam*) and ordeals (*ujang*) are the performative devices through which hidden truths are determined. *Mbiam* has a mutable character, and its meaning varies according to context, variously oath, ordeal, and poison.⁴⁹ Usen Udo Usen therefore grasped the significance of combating ambiguity and secrecy with the most familiar device of the Annang and Ibibio cultural repertoire, the oath. In paternalistic fashion Fountain reported that while Usen had a fairly high standard of education, he nevertheless "firmly believed in the actual supernatural powers of the juju of his people." *Mbiam* was both lie detector and deterrent. Failure to swear and illness attributed to false swearing were signs of guilt, and mass oath-swearing created a baseline placing the population on notice.

The conjunction of customary and colonial codes of justice employed during the tour was not lost on observers. Assistant Superintendent Williams later wrote that "with hindsight these counter-measures appear to have been more effective than the normal process of a civilized law and criminal jurisprudence."⁵⁰ The killings continued even as the tour proceeded, and eleven more deaths would be reported, but news of the efficacy of the oath and the effects of false swearing began to spread. On July 25, 1947, villagers in Ibiiana heard of a man from Ikot Akpabong who had begun to suffer from a strange sensation after taking the oath and had offered a cow and six hundred manilas to have the oath revoked.⁵¹ Optimistic about the deterrent effect of such news, the union was able to proclaim the tour a success, and the authorities could justify its approval. Police officers like Williams reported that the "bizarre turn" in the eradication of the killings was therefore brought about by the use of more powerful spiritual means in the oaths overseen by Usen, which had effectively neutralized "the Idiong juju of Ekpe Owo."⁵²

Aftermath and Accusations

"It is difficult to assess the effect of the tour in preventing or reducing the murders," the resident reported, "but it resulted in the collection of much useful information and calming of public opinion."⁵³ Despite the official success of the Ibibio Union's tour, for those involved it ended in controversy. Dr. Egbert Udo Udoma, the union president, claimed that Usen Udo Usen had submitted a report on the tour to the authorities without prior approval from the union and without it being discussed or signed by other members of the delegation. Whether this was a deliberate ruse or an accidental oversight, the consequences were significant. Usen's report corroborated the police's inquiries in key respects, notably that *idionj* divination and charm preparation had contributed to the murders, and he therefore lent backing to the authorities' decision to ban *idionj* and undermined the union's opposition to its prohibition.

Usen's report was only loosely based on the evidence compiled in the tour diary, and it seems likely that he had access to police files before he completed his report. The suspects named in Usen's report were already well known to the police, but he told them a convincing story about how the murders began that drew together previous loose ends. Usen claimed that an *idionj*, Akpan Ekpedeme, and his sister's son, Akpan Nyoho, had both kept company with a gang of highway robbers for whom Akpan Ekpedeme prepared protective charms. One gang member was being harassed by a creditor, and another suspected his wife of adultery, so the robbers, Usen suggested, decided to use their charms to eliminate their enemies. Their success and apparent immunity from detection led them to become hired assassins, with agents who would approach people known to have grudges or disputes asking for fifty manilas for a consultation fee and one hundred manilas for the "leopard men" to eliminate their opponent. Usen further suggested that an *idionj* member, Ukpong Eto of Ediene Atai, had consulted Akpan Ekpedeme to procure a new human head for his oracle and as a result not only became familiar with the various charms used by the leopard men but also found a market for the sale of body parts (heads, arms, and genitalia) from the victims by selling them to new *idionj* members as a condition of their initiation.⁵⁴

Usen's theory was that *idionj* used their knowledge of existing personal rivalries and of court disputes over land, brideprice, and debts to identify victims for the leopard men. He thus argued that the ritual and revenge theories that the police had been oscillating between were not mutually exclusive but overlapped. Most of this had long been

suspected by the police, but coming from Usen, the man who had visited every village affected by the murders, who had off-the-record evidence, and who was an Ibibio speaker himself and apparently understood the nature and meanings of charms and rituals, it was adopted as clear proof of the police's stance. As a result Usen was immediately seconded to the police detachment on special duties and became their leopard murder specialist. Indeed, his conclusions became the linchpin of the police's case. The prohibition of *idionj* had failed to stop the killings, and after six months the government's stance was not only unproved but was also subject to widespread criticism. From their side the police cited events from fifty years earlier involving human leopard killings in Sierra Leone in support of the assertion that these were ritual murders. Senior officers in the Nigerian investigation had only a limited knowledge of these events, however, as they tried in vain to consult an out-of-print account of the trials in Sierra Leone at Foyles bookshop in London. This left Usen's evidence, which was cited directly by the police in their effort to assure themselves (the Criminal Investigation Division commissioner in Lagos and the House of Commons in London) that they had not blundered in their decision to prohibit the *idionj* diviners.

The Ibibio Union, meanwhile, summoned Usen to appear before a public assembly in Ikot Okoro in March 1948 to justify the claims made in his report. Passages of the report in which he had accused prominent persons of being members of the man-leopard society were read aloud in English, and the union members in turn questioned Usen directly about the accusations he had made against these men. The atmosphere was tense, and Usen had to be protected by a police cordon when the crowd tried to break through and attack him. The most dramatic moments of the meeting arose in a cross-examination of Usen by Ukpong Eto, the man Usen accused of carrying on Akpan Ekpedeme's role of procuring skulls for new *idionj* initiates. A record of this conversation appears in Udoma's memoir, written with distinct prejudice against Usen and which cannot be corroborated. It is revealing nevertheless and suggests that relationships during the tour were not all they had appeared. It claims that Usen and the chief were friends and that on the three occasions on which Ukpong Eto had been arrested Usen had stood bail for him:

UKPONG ETO: If you knew that I was a member of the man-leopard society, being one of the original founders with Akpan Ekpedeme then dead, why did you volunteer to take on my bail?

USEN UDO USEN: Having associated with you for a long time I had always entertained doubt as to your being concerned with the man-leopard society. . . .

UE: I appeal to you in the name of God to reveal the name of your informer.

UUU: I cannot now remember his name.

UE: I suggest you are lying because no one ever gave you such information.

UUU: No answer.

UE: Are you prepared to take a solemn oath that I am a member of the man-leopard society?

UUU: I cannot swear.⁵⁵

With this palpable irony, namely, that the man who had sworn the inhabitants of eighty villages would not himself be sworn, the plot thickened. At the Ibibio Union meeting on May 29, 1948, a resolution was passed suspending Usen from the union and calling for everything possible to be done to bring him to justice for his conduct: "Feelings ran high when it was discovered that certain portions of the report contain serious but fantastic and groundless allegations against Ibibio chiefs and the *Idionj* Society. It is believed that Mr Usen, for his own personal advancement and in order to earn honour and promotion from Government, had secretly forwarded the report to Government well knowing that the serious allegations contained in the report are entirely baseless."⁵⁶ According to police reports, the Ibibio Union sought to discredit Usen Udo Usen further by accusing him of acting as a police agent, of taking bribes from chiefs so as not to expose them as *idionj*, and of embezzling union funds. A committee of Ibibio Union members formed to investigate Usen's report claimed that it was "a carefully planned imaginative fabrication clothed in the garb of realism and half-truths. . . . Unless Mr Usen Udo Usen was himself a member of the so-called man-leopard society . . . he could not have been in a position to disclose all that the report contained."⁵⁷

The Ibibio Union passed resolutions and signed petitions over the next five years for a commission of inquiry into the man-leopard murders and for the authorities to provide proof to justify the ban on *idionj*.⁵⁸ There was considerable speculation as to the reason for this apparently unlikely alliance of the self-styled "intelligentsia" with the forces of rural conservatism and why the mission-educated elites of the union supported the *idionj* diviners so vehemently and for so long. A number of reasons presented themselves. The union's defense of *idionj* was assumed to be influenced by senior figures within the Ibibio Union who were themselves *idionj* members, including Obong Ntuen Ibok of Essene in Opobo District. During the police raid of February 1947, his

idion paraphernalia was destroyed, he was detained in Calabar for three months, and he claimed that he had been robbed of £1,200 in the process. Ironically, prior to his arrest he had accommodated police during their investigations in Essene, and it was Ntuen Ibok who had proposed the tour of the "leopard area" to restore the peace. Because of these connections the authorities believed that senior members of the union who were *idion* diviners, like Ntuen Ibok, were using the union and the devices of colonial law at the disposal of its "intelligentsia" to fight the ban. In July 1947, for instance, a former clerk, Udom, was alleged to have collected £122 from *idion* members to finance a petition against the ban and had asked Dr. Udoma to write it.⁵⁹

Events at the Ibibio Union's annual conference held in August 1948 were keenly observed. Undercover Special Branch police reported that Dr. Udoma had come to an agreement with the *idion* members of the union that "in the event of getting the Idiong Cult restored the Union would waive the repayment of a loan advanced to him for his legal training—a sum believed to be in the region of £2,000."⁶⁰ It was reported that Usen "was the first victim sacrificed in Udoma's campaign" and that he had ordered a former journalist, S. E. Hezekiah, to smear Usen in the press. The police claimed that no device to discredit Usen was left untried and that the Union threatened to bring criminal charges against Usen for embezzling union funds while he was general secretary unless he agreed to make a public withdrawal of his statement incriminating the *idion* cult.⁶¹ At the conference Usen was dismissed from membership in the Ibibio Union for life, and it was resolved that he be ostracized by Ibibio people everywhere for having "plotted the destruction of leading personalities by deliberately picking them out, well-knowing that they were innocent, and accusing them falsely of being members of the man-leopard society."⁶² No evidence suggests whether it was seen as a credible threat, but the police report from the union conference further claimed that "Native doctors were employed to prepare charms against him [Usen] in order to bring about his death."⁶³

The union's condemnation of its own former secretary coincided with a dramatic twist in the murder investigations. During the Ibibio Union's tour, a new district officer was appointed to administer Opobo Division, John McCall. Initially concerned about the number of acquittals in supreme court cases, he found serious discrepancies in eyewitness statements when he reviewed the evidence and was shocked at the paucity of hard evidence for the existence of the man-leopards. His point was quite simple, that the man-leopard episode had been conjured

up not by the *idion* society but by mass hysteria and that the killings were not elaborate simulations but genuine bush leopard attacks. The district officer and his assistant, Dennis Gibbs, tested this theory when they organized a leopard hunt.⁶⁴ It was not the first hunt of the investigations, but it was more extensive than previous efforts and successfully trapped a number of leopards, including a seven-foot "man-eater" that had suffered an injury to its paw and was therefore unable to kill its normal prey. McCall's theory appeared all the more probable as only one "leopard" killing was reported after the hunt, and this was outside the "leopard area."

McCall's allegations turned the whole investigation on its head. He was adamant that even if his theory about the leopards was wrong and that the deaths were the result of murder, then the colonial criminal justice system had hanged the wrong men. His reports were evidence of a rift that had emerged between the police and the district administration. McCall criticized Fountain's police investigation and questioned the faith he placed in the speculative findings of Usen's report. McCall's knowledge of the murder cases was not comprehensive, nor was his acumen for forensics more than amateurish, but the questions he raised concerning the use of material evidence were devastating. Why had the police relied on the confession evidence in the P. C. Chima case when it had not held up in court and the accused had been acquitted? And why, he asked, had police attention focused squarely on the use of body parts when in the vast majority of cases they had never been removed from the scene of the crime? Usen's report had suggested that murders were performed to obtain male and female genitalia and skulls for ritual purposes, but there was never any evidence that genitalia had been touched nor that skulls had ever been removed. McCall questioned Usen on this very point, who replied that he was "referring to killing custom which pertained in very olden time, and not during the present series of killings."⁶⁵

Sixteen convicted men were due to be executed when McCall urgently submitted a series of secret reports detailing these reservations in the days before Christmas 1947. McCall insisted that his correspondence be passed to the secretary of state, and his allegations therefore threatened to undermine the reputations of all those involved in the investigations. Indeed, in November 1947, when McCall's views surfaced, the colonial secretary had already been asked in the House of Commons to justify the "vast number of death sentences passed."⁶⁶ The government's response was predictable. McCall was given twenty-four

hours to leave his post and was ordered to refrain from drawing attention to his transfer to Lagos.⁶⁷

McCall's reports of December 1947, however, had become general knowledge, and chiefs from Opobo sent telegrams to London petitioning against his hasty transfer. Crucially for the chiefs and the Ibibio Union, McCall's allegations enabled them not only to deny *idion* involvement in the killings but more generally to redeem the good name of Ibibioland by dismissing any suggestions that the killings were conducted by the man-leopard society for ritual purposes at all: "It surprises the bulk of the Ibibio people to hear that the Idiong society, a society as old as the hills in Ibibioland, has connection with the recent man-leopard menace, there being no society in Ibibioland known as the 'Man-Leopard Society.' . . . [W]e humbly pray to government to repeal the legislation against this purely religious society of the Ibibio people, as freedom of worship constitutes good government."⁶⁸ While these events unfolded in the early months of 1948, Usen Udo Usen had been working with the Nigeria police contingent based in Ikot Okoro. Usen, it was claimed, continued to voice his anti-*idion* sentiments, and the Ibibio Union's campaign against him "did not deter Usen from his self-imposed task . . . he gave up his weekends and most of his other spare time to visiting different parts of the area, using his very considerable influence with the local people and continuing to supply most useful information to the police."⁶⁹ Backed by local court and council members, Usen embarked on a second tour of the man-leopard villages in 1948. He was convinced that murderers had evaded the effects of the *mbiam* oath sworn the previous year by use of an antidote, and despite the inconclusive results of the previous tour, he was sure that oath swearing was the only means by which the killings would finally be stopped. Hence, Usen set about obtaining from "medicine men" various medicines and charms, and thus armed he held meetings and repeated the oath-swearing ceremonies in nearly every one of the affected Annang villages. Fountain reported that from the start Usen was well received and that his second tour was an acclaimed success.

The final twist came on February 21, 1948, when Akpan Ukpon Eto, the son of Chief Ukpon Eto of Ediene Atai, with whom Usen had clashed over the contents of his report, died suddenly. An exhumation order was obtained by the medical officer, who was unable to certify the cause of death. The chief's son was rumored to have been a leading "man-leopard" himself and had been accused of but never charged with the murder of P. C. Chima the year before. He had taken Usen's

oath when he visited the village a fortnight previously during which the *mbiam* was held against his chest, back, and head, parts of the body where Akpan Ukpon Eto complained of pains before he died. Rumors spread that he died of swearing a false oath and that he had confessed this before his death. Usen's reputation, Fountain claimed, was redeemed, and apart from the single death in March 1948, the murders stopped. Among the various factors that had broken the murder cult, Fountain wrote that "the work of Mr Usen may certainly be given a high place on the list."⁷⁰

The provincial authorities deemed that a formal inquiry into the man-leopard murders would prove politically unsettling. At a meeting with the chief commissioner of the eastern provinces in March 1950, the Ibibio Union was told that a commission of inquiry into the killings would have led to "a great deal of unpleasant publicity and . . . endless complications."⁷¹ Partly this would have appeared to concede to the Ibibio Union's demands, and partly such an enquiry would have had to address McCall's potentially embarrassing concerns. Hence, in conspicuous contrast to other major incidents in the eastern provinces, such as the Women's War of 1929 and the Enugu Colliery shootings of 1949, the man-leopard murder investigation simply petered out.

After his secondment with the police, Usen reverted to the provincial administration and was transferred first to Ikot Ekpene, then to his home district of Itu, and finally at his request to the headquarters of the regional administration in Enugu. In the margin of a report that referred to Usen's death after a short illness in Enugu, Frank Williams, a junior police officer with the investigation, wrote "Was Poisoned!!" In an article he wrote later for a police journal he expanded: "[T]his District Clerk died mysteriously shortly afterwards. It is quite probable that he was poisoned for his disclosures, he had obviously incurred the disfavour of some of his fellow tribesmen. The cassava root, grown extensively in the area and the staple diet, is edible only after lengthy processing. In its early stages of preparation for food, it is poisonous and a well-known insidious means in the disposal of unwanted persons."⁷² Usen, along with the handful of Annang court members who supported the investigations in 1948, was awarded the Certificate of Honour on the king's birthday in 1949. The Ibibio Union claimed that the posthumous award was a "face-saving device."⁷³

Honored by the colonial authorities but publicly outcast from his own community, had Usen Udo Usen betrayed his people, or was he a

political fall guy? Several points can be made concerning the events narrated here that also have a central bearing on how clerks mediated law and authority in colonial Africa. The first touches on modes of justice and knowledge, the second relates to Usen's attempt to mediate between the various parties engaged in the murder investigations, and the third concerns something of the man and his motivations.

The Ibibio Union would condemn Usen's report on the grounds that he had intended to exploit the gullibility of expatriate administrative officials by a display of his knowledge of the social structure, norms, and beliefs of the Ibibio people.⁷⁴ Usen Udo Usen, then, was portrayed as the "man who knew too much." Indeed, the murder investigations demonstrate that knowledge and ways of knowing were critical. Usen's part in the murder inquiries was crucial not only because of the structural and personal way in which he brokered between institutions but also because of the way he mediated between different ways of knowing. For the authorities the man-leopard society was a knowable object of colonial rationality that had, so officers mused, evaded detection during the extensive 1930s inquiries for the clan intelligence reports. Indeed, throughout the campaign the police called for a specialist, an anthropologist, to be hired to investigate the "leopard society." The names of S. F. Nadel, Audrey Richards, Phyllis Kaberry, and J. S. Harris were all mentioned in connection with the proposed anthropological investigation, which, like the formal inquiry, was called off as political sensitivities increased.⁷⁵

Usen, in fact, had gained a unique insight into colonial modalities of the ethnographic method as Jeffreys's interpreter, and his report was a product of it. Yet if a "man-leopard" society had existed, neither the police's thumbscrews nor the anthropologist's observations stood much chance of penetrating its secrets, and Usen knew it. Usen grasped the significance that in this context truth was established by testing and that guilt was determined not in a courtroom trial but in trial by ordeal. Because of this over fifty years later those who remember the events of 1947 and 1948 in the former Abak Division say that it was the oaths Usen and the chiefs administered that brought the killings to an end. Usen's response demonstrates Karen Field's point that those who move effectively into insurgencies understand the significance of the knowledge and practice of routine cultural patterns in reestablishing order.⁷⁶ One of the most potent and contradictory images from these events must be that of the district clerk who championed the campaign against the *idion*

diviners, but who undertook this campaign with the use of charms and substances acquired from specialists in precisely the same arts.

Usen's actions demonstrate the improvisation with which colonial clerks subverted colonial modes of authority and how they were translated into locally effective terms. On the political level, however, his career also shows how their room for maneuvering could evaporate. In terms of the second point regarding Usen's institutional loyalties, it is evident that events overtook him quickly both in the micropolitics of the investigation and within the broader sweep of national political change. During the war years clerks had to negotiate the increasingly difficult political contradiction of being from the educated class, which criticized colonial rule, while at the same time being among those who helped to enforce it. In southeastern Nigeria 1947 was in fact a key moment for these political trajectories. Specifically, these few months represented the cusp of a fundamental change in relations between "improvement unions" like the Ibibio Union and the colonial state.⁷⁷ In the twenty years Usen had been a member of the Ibibio Union, no single issue before the ban on *idion* had ruptured relations between its leaders and the resident of Calabar Province. The provincial authorities, indeed, had consistently sought to nurture the union as the body around which one day an amalgamated Ibibio Division could be organized. Yet coinciding with the Local Government Dispatch of 1947, a secret review was underway in the eastern provinces of the political threat of the improvement unions of whom the authorities had lost sight during the war, and who were buoyed by their recent affiliation with the National Council, which was led by the country's leading nationalists. By this time, then, the Ibibio Union had become a significant political force and was recognized as such both by local communities and by the authorities.

The more explicitly political and anticolonial trajectory of the unions and their more confident and strident tone of criticism toward the government from this moment in 1947 put those among their members who were part of the colonial machinery, such as clerks, in a potentially awkward position. Underlying the tension was an increasingly dismissive view among the intelligentsia toward government service, which was especially vehement when those in receipt of scholarships funded by the improvement unions entered the colonial administration. Once the lawyers and newspaper men of the union seized on the apparent injustices of the man-leopard murder inquiries, especially the ban on the

idion society, which they described as a gross infringement of religious liberties, they would publicly and persistently attempt to put the colonial administration on trial. Usen had therefore found himself on the wrong side over an issue that may have seemed innocuous enough to him at the time he submitted his report but that was progressively being recast not in the colonial context of law and order but in a nationalist framework of rights and freedoms.

Despite the shifting ground of political alliances, the idea that Usen was a victim of circumstance nevertheless fails to tell us the whole story, and a key puzzle remains. Since Usen knew better than most that the Ibibio Union's line on the *idion* prohibition was resolute, why did he persevere in support of the government and why did he therefore allow himself to be set up to be despised by and ostracized from his own people? This question brings us to the final issue, which relates to his personal motivations. As a colonial clerk was Usen the collaborator or the trickster? Annang and Ibibio conceptions of the intermediary also draw on this distinction. Of those who insert themselves within a privileged site of brokerage to "make trouble so that they can eat" and to "take from each side," Annang say *siguongo inyongo* ("what comes out will not pass"). Such a term is used in opposition to the conception of *adaufot*. Precolonial economic and political links between villages were maintained by intermediaries called *adaufot* (literally "in-between"). This term *adaufot* has continued to refer to an upstanding person who mediates and hears from both sides in order to make peace. In local terms Usen represented himself as such an intermediary figure in opposition to the "tricksters." He was among those senior, long-serving clerks who not only stood apart from the criticism leveled at ill-educated bribe takers within the service, but also were themselves part of an emergent middle-class and members of associations who opposed bribery and corruption.⁷⁸

Usen had been in colonial service for at least twenty-three years. He knew his Bible well probably from his schooling in the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland in Itu, and in his controversial report he left a record of his views on local people. These fragments combine to suggest the profile of a man whose ethical and political outlook was distinctly shaped by both mission teaching and colonial duty. His view of the local Annang population in the man-leopard villages was of "sav- age men who were clever only in practising wickedness." He noted passages of sermons from interdenominational church services that were held on each Sunday during the tour and attacked what he called

the barbarous work of the new "spiritual churches" who engaged in faith healing. And he drew attention to those whom he called "men of character" and to distinguished church reverends, village heads, and court clerks who displayed that "high sense of duty and honesty" of which he himself was so proud.⁷⁹ In short he had become not only an agent of but a champion for the colonial order.

His was not as glamorous or as high profile a profession as the lawyers and journalists who were increasingly making the news, but for the duration of the first tour Usen was untouchable. The most prominent chiefs in the province, the resident, the district officers, the police, the court clerks from two divisions, not to mention the hundreds of local people he confronted each day—all were hanging on his word. As a clerk Usen was clearly flattered by and thrived on the attention. And while Usen and the tour party were met with grim findings and grave responsibilities at many of their stops, at others they were met with school children performing dances, and in one instance Mrs. Usen, who had joined him for a few days, was asked by a Catholic Church school to hand out the cups on prize day. This was the stuff of a district officer's or a resident's tour. In his report and his later correspondence, he would point out the deplorable state of the roads in certain villages, the illegality of particular local customs, the commendable achievement of mission schools, and how a village group might be better organized to be closer to court. These were precisely the observations and recommendations of senior colonial staff. The Ibibio Union Tour Delegation was part peacekeeping mission and part imperial pageant, and it is difficult to see how this could not have boosted Usen's sense of his own self-importance and ultimately his misplaced sense of where his own prospects were best served.

Notes

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1. Although I am distinguishing here between official roles—letter writers, clerks, interpreters—we should also be mindful that these categories often overlapped and people's roles were often improvised. Robert Cudjoe, a Ghanaian, worked in southeastern Nigeria during the second decade of the twentieth

century as an interpreter, though his official role was district carpenter (Cudjoe, "Some Reminiscences").

2. Derrick, "Native Clerk."
3. Ayandele, *Educated Elite*.
4. Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs*.
5. Bayart, "Social Capital," 46.
6. *Daily Mail* (London), June 30, 1947.
7. Several coastal West African states, including Liberia, Sierra Leone, Gabon, and Senegal had, from the 1880s to the 1920s, witnessed fatal assaults that were disguised by simulating the injuries inflicted by wild animals on their prey and that were linked to societies of human-leopards, human-alligators, and human-baboons. Court confessions suggested that these were secret clubs whose members consumed human flesh and used it in the preparation of charms to make themselves rich and powerful. Other "big-cat killings" revealed motives of political assassination. In the Congo in the early 1930s, the Belgian authorities waged an intense campaign against man-leopard killers, known as *wahokohoko*, who were specialist assassins hired by prominent chiefs during an interclan conflict. Concurrent with events in Nigeria during 1947, 103 deaths in the Turu region of Singida Province in central Tanganyika were attributed to human-lions (*mbojo*). For an overview, see Lindsog, *African Leopard Men*; and Joset, *Les sociétés secrètes*; on the murders in Calabar Province, see Nwaka, "Leopard Killings."
8. Nigerian National Archive, Enugu NAE, ABAKDIST 1/2/88.
9. Noah, "Ibibio Union"; Nwaka, "Ibibio Union."
10. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*.
11. During the initial colonial enclosures in the second decade of the twentieth century, very few patrilineal clan heads, *okuku*, were recognized or "warranted," though the title has since become widely employed by village heads.
12. NAE, CSE 1/85/4905A.
13. See Naanen, "Economy within an Economy."
14. Cases emerged in the 1940s of *idionj* suing their Christian heirs for lost initiation fees (NAE, CALPROF 3/1/1955). The Christ Army Church and the Sabbath Church spread into the Annang hinterland from the commercial ports of Bonny and Opobo by capitalizing on the formalism of the Qua Iboe Mission and the syncretic charismatic impulse of the Spirit Movement, which had swept across the province in 1927 and annually throughout the 1930s. See Abasiattai, "Oberi Okaima Christian Mission."
15. In the Ibibio dialect the killers were referred to as *Ekpe Ikpa Ukot*, the "leopards who walk in shoes."
16. Inspector Ntima, in charge of the Opobo Police Detachment, was transferred in disgrace on suspicion that the chiefs of the "leopard area" were behind the killings and had bribed him to classify previous murders as wild leopard killings (NAE, OPODIST 1/10/8).

17. Okon Bassey's wives reported how he had shown them leopard pad marks on Dan Udofia's grave and that he had said, "A leopard always dances on the grave of its victim" (NAE, ABAKDIST 1/3/2).
18. The administration of Abak and Opobo Divisions was reformed with the creation of the "leopard area" in February 1946, which comprised eight native court areas from Abak and Opobo Divisions.
19. Widespread rumors that death sentences in previous cases had not been carried out and that the convicts had been conscripted or sentenced to hard labor convinced officials to conduct executions in public.
20. Rhodes House (hereafter RH), Oxford, U.K., MSS Afr.s.1784 (18).
21. The ritual and revenge motives were the predominant though by no means the only theories attributed to the murders both at the time and subsequently. The killers have been linked to Igbo blacksmiths (by the Ibibio Union), to demobilized soldiers (Okon, "Man-Leopard Society"), and to a revival of the *ekpe* secret society (Nwaka, "Leopard Killings").
22. This theory may also be linked to the fact that during a previous posting in Ogoja Province in 1938, the district officer F. R. Kay had investigated head-hunting murders in Obubra and was struck by the similarity of the mutilation with the leopard killings, particularly that facial tissue was removed from the victims in both cases (NAE, ABAKDIST 1/3/1).
23. Comments made in the earliest ethnographic accounts by Jeffreys had suggested a precolonial link between *idionj* and the Long Juju at Arochukwu, which served to heighten this speculation (cf. Afigbo, "External Contacts and Relations").
24. Public Records Office (hereafter PRO), London, CO 583/294/3.
25. CALPROF 13/1/8. The fact that no strangers were killed during *ekpe-owo* seemed to confirm that the killings were "personal matters."
26. Quotations respectively from RH, MSS Afr.s.1784 (18); NAE, CALPROF 17/1/1595.
27. In the case of 60 additional deaths that were investigated, making a total of 157, the motives were uncertain.
28. NAE, ABAKDIST 1/2/88.
29. This observation also reflects a common assumption that the killings occurred in two distinct phases, firstly by authentic "leopard-men" who employed all the various devices (costumes, medicines, and claws) to disguise their acts, and second, by those who effected crude imitations of the "leopard-style."
30. The parallel with previous acts of rebellion in south-eastern Nigeria was raised at the time of the killings. Nyong Essien, for instance, claimed that, "the Leopard Society was caused by a similar situation which gave rise to the Aba riot" (*Eastern Nigerian Guardian*, 2 April 1947).
31. NAE, ABAKDIST 1/2/90.
32. NAE, CALPROF 17/1/1598.
33. On the typology of such killings, see R. Law, "Human Sacrifice". Cf. on

"medicine murders," see Gocking, "Chieftaincy Dispute"; Murray and Sanders, "Medicine Murder"; Rathbone, *Murder and Politics*.

34. NAE, CSE 1/85/9284.

35. NAE, CSE 1/85/9284.

36. NAE, CALPROF 3/1/1955.

37. NAE, OPODIST 1/10/5.

38. PRO, CO 583/294/3.

39. NAE, CALPROF 7/1/1418.

40. NAE, ABAKDIST 1/2/80.

41. *Nigerian Eastern Mail*, October 11, 1947.

42. RH, MSS Afr.s.1784 (18).

43. NAE, CALPROF 7/1/1418.

44. NAE, OPODIST 1/1/47.

45. NAE, OPODIST 1/10/6.

46. The use of "counter-charms" against *ekpe-owo* was reported as a popular response to the killings. In August 1946 Chief Sampson Akpan Ekpo of Ikot Ibak in Opobo Division had paid eight pounds to a "native doctor" for the preparation of a charm that was guaranteed to protect his village against *ekpe-owo* and that would ensure the immediate arrest of the murderer if a killing was to occur (NAE, CALPROF 17/1/1598).

47. It was no coincidence that during the man-leopard murders the Qua Iboe Mission was reportedly "flooded" with new converts. And its cause was further promoted when its new rival the Christ Army Church was implicated (albeit indirectly) in the murders and "[t]he burning of the idols of the *Idion* by the police gave the Church a wonderful opportunity for witness" (Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, U.K., D/3301/GC/9/3).

48. The process of stepping over an object is common in Annang ritual practice. *Ekong* masquerade players, for instance, must jump over a net to signify that they are true initiates. No two reports of the substance used in the oath are the same, with references to villagers touching a pen, a doll, and a brass door knob, and to consuming or smearing on their bodies a clear liquid. It is possible that the delegation did not wish to elicit official consternation over the use of *mbiam* and therefore used innocuous objects. It is also possible that the substances were switched between villages to prevent the manufacture of an antidote from the same source. *Mbiam* can be of any substance, but crucially its origin should be secret (hence a preference for saltwater).

49. Similar features of the *hale* of the Mende are described in Jedrej, "Medicine, Fetish and Secret Society."

50. RH, MSS. Afr.s.1784 (18).

51. NAE, CALPROF 7/1/1418.

52. RH, MSS Afr.s.1784 (18).

53. RH, MSS Afr.S.1505.2.

54. NAE, OPODIST 1/10/6.

55. Udoma, *Story of the Ibibio State Union*, 166.

56. *Nigerian Eastern Mail*, July 10, 1948.

57. Udoma, *Story of the Ibibio State Union*, 142.

58. The prohibition on *idion* was extended in 1951 to include the worship and invocation of *idion*, and it was further recommended that the ban be extended to the whole of Calabar Province following a murder in Eket.

59. Udoma refused but another barrister, Ibeziaku, wrote the petition for a fee of 30 guineas (NAE, OPODIST 1/1/47).

60. NAE, OPODIST 1/10/3.

61. NAE, OPODIST 1/10/3.

62. Udoma, *Story of the Ibibio State Union*, 178.

63. NAE, OPODIST 1/10/3.

64. McCall reported that Gibbs kept a pet leopard in order to establish its feeding and killing behavior. McCall had been an administrative officer in the eastern provinces for eleven years. Gibbs, a former wing commander with the Royal Air Force, had a distinguished war record.

65. NAE, OPODIST 1/10/3.

66. *Evening Standard* (London), November 19, 1947.

67. McCall stood by these claims, particularly the wild-leopard theory in the British press and in response to academic writings (McCall, "Comment").

68. *Nigerian Eastern Mail*, July 3, 1948.

69. RH, MSS Afr.s.1784 (18).

70. RH, MSS Afr.s.1784 (18).

71. NAE, CALPROF 5/1/308.

72. RH, MSS Afr.s.1784 (18).

73. RH, MSS. Afr.s.1784 (18).

74. Udoma, *Story of the Ibibio State Union*, 163.

75. In addition Meyer Fortes and Raymond Firth were both asked to propose candidates for a Colonial Social Science Research Council-funded project in 1948 and 1949 that aimed to shed light on the murders while posing under the camouflage of a more general and innocuous study (PRO, CO 583/294/4).

76. Fields, "Political Contingencies," 593.

77. We need to be wary of here, however, of a teleology that would equate the "progressives" of the 1930s with the "political class" of the 1950s, since there was, as Peel notes, "a disjunction as well as a linkage between 'nationalism,' *qua* the national anti-colonial movement, and the local political tendencies related to it" (Peel, *Ijeshas and Nigerians*, 179).

78. Usen, for instance, had accompanied the Ibibio Union delegations in 1941 and 1942 around the district offices and court houses of Calabar Province, "enlightening" court and council members and his fellow civil servants against bribe taking. Groups specifically organized around this issue, such as the League of Bribe Scorners, would emerge some years later.

79. NAE, OPODIST 1/10/6.